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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COAST GUARD PETTY OFFICERS CONVICTED OF
CONSPIRACY TO IMPORT COCAINE**

BALTIMORE, Maryland - Thomas M. DiBiagio, United States Attorney for the District of Maryland, announced that Mr. Wendy Bens, age 25, of Boston, Massachusetts, was convicted in federal court today, after a six-day jury trial, of conspiracy to import cocaine, importation of cocaine, possession with intent to distribute cocaine, conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime.

According to evidence presented at trial, Bens, an electrician's mate, was a United States Coast Guard petty officer assigned to the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Spencer, which is home-ported in Boston, Massachusetts. Bens' most recent tour of duty on board the Spencer included drug interdiction work among the islands of the Caribbean. However, starting on or before August 2003 Bens used his contacts in the Caribbean to import cocaine into the United States.

According to trial evidence, in January 2004 Bens arranged for and paid a courier, who was

a former Grenadian Coast Guard sailor, to travel to Curacao, Netherlands Antilles, where the courier picked up a suitcase that had 2.4 kilograms of powder cocaine hidden within the lining. The suitcase was to be brought back into the United States and delivered to Bens. However, when the courier arrived at BWI airport on January 27, 2004, he was stopped by Customs and Border Protection officers who discovered the cocaine.

After a series of telephone conversations with the courier, Bens traveled from Boston to Baltimore with another U.S. Coast Guard petty officer, co-defendant Jonathan Louis DeCarlo, age 23, of Boston, to pick up the suitcase of cocaine. Bens armed himself with a semiautomatic handgun, and he and DeCarlo brought two Coast Guard-issued bullet-proof vests that had been wrongfully taken from their ship. They arrived in Baltimore on January 31, 2004 where they picked up a suitcase in which law enforcement agents had placed a sham substance designed to look like cocaine. Bens and DeCarlo took the sham cocaine back to a hotel room and were arrested by federal agents.

Bens faces a sentence of up to 40 years of imprisonment and a \$2 million fine. His sentencing date is set for February 7, 2005. DeCarlo previously pled guilty to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute the cocaine and the courier previously pled guilty to conspiracy to import cocaine. DeCarlo and the courier also face sentences of up to 40 years imprisonment and a \$2 million fine.

The case was investigated by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security, and Baltimore Police Department Task Force Officers with the assistance of the Coast Guard Investigative Service. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Michael J. Leotta and Philip S. Jackson.